

The Greening of Duxbury

By THE REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY

The Duxbury Rural Society (in 1916, joined with the Historical Society) began with the suggestion expressed by Florence C. Ford in her paper, read before a group known as the "Literary Club," that some kind of village improvement society be formed to enhance the welfare of the town. Accordingly, an organization was called into being at the residence of the Rev. A.D. Burr, minister of The First Parish Church. At an early meeting of this group, the question of what should be done first came up for discussion, namely, whether to plant trees or buy street lamps. Street lamps won, as the Society's logo illustrates but trees were also very much a priority.

One hundred trees were soon ordered to provide shade in the school yards so children would have a cool place to eat their lunch, brought from home usually in the form of sandwiches. Streets were soon planted with trees, 240 in all, at a cost of \$519.

Street lamps had also been placed on condition that benefiting neighbors would provide the oil and the daily lighting and extinguishing of the lamps. The Society's minutes given to me by Polly Nash, record a weekly payment of 25 cents to a teenage lad who took on this task of tending one lantern.

The Society's efforts to "improve the quality of life" in Duxbury took on many functions; one was the establishing of the granite horse drinking troughs at the flagpoles, both at the Cable Office corner and at Hall's Corner, both bearing the date of 1897. One still stands at the parklet above Blue Fish River, maintained by the Duxbury Community Garden Club. The other was removed on rollers by 3 selectmen because it had become a traffic hazard. It has not been seen for many years. An exhaustive search was conducted 3 years ago, including the digging of a ditch, 8 feet deep, 25 feet wide and 100 feet long. A sonar computer was used as well with no result. But I have not given up the search.

This essay is an effort to remind *Clipper* readers that our present Duxbury "green," i.e., the luxuriant display of tree growths we now enjoy, is a relatively recent phenomenon. We know that the 1640's saw a thick growth of pines on Clark's Island, which were confiscated by Cromwell for his ships, in his short-lived ascendancy as ruler of England.

We also can assume that the lush tree growth enjoyed by the town at the height of our great ship building period from 1800 to 1870, was in great demand and

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might help explain the absence of trees in the town at the time the Rural Society was formed.

Reading between the lines of Town Meeting records and selectmen's minutes it is quite clear that the elimination of vast acres of tree growths was a casualty of Duxbury's great ship building enterprise. Dorothy Wentworth's excellent book on the *Settlement and Growth of Duxbury* emphasizes the dove tailing of various resources that came together to make shipbuilding and world shipping trade a reality. The farms providing food stores for the long sea voyager, the quantities of lumber and mills to provide them with ample water power (28 mills were operating at their height), the teams of oxen, bred on the farms to haul the trees for building, oak for keels, pine for spars and masts, cherry for the "knees" of the ships - all of these were part of the enterprise. All I know is when the Society was formed to "improve the quality of life" in Duxbury, the first thing they did was to plant trees.

I also know that as I was growing up, barren landscapes were the norm in the town. I recall the hill opposite Pilgrim Church was as bare as the proverbial "bald man's head," and was our favorite sledding site. The land on Standish Shore was also so bare you could see the bay at high tide without hindrance from Brewster's farm. We used to pasture our heifers from North Hill on Ford's acres. Across from the entrance were barren grass lands with a few black and blueberry bushes scattered about. This was the "deforestation" of Duxbury in the teen's and 20s, as a recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly* states.

But something has happened almost by accident to restore our trees and forests. For example, you can walk the length of Washington St. and never realize you are treading on a narrow path between a wide marsh and the bay. Such is the situation today, and the 15 citizens who celebrated "Earth Day's Silver Anniversary" at Bumpus Park could recall just how far Duxbury has come in its "greening." But it is not only Duxbury that is enjoying this new explosion of arbor interest, all the northeast is in contrast to the Europeans who have not had a similar experience.

The *Atlantic* article goes on to elaborate this "explosion of green" comparing it to a program of "rejuvenation." Duxbury has shown signs of this "greening" in its reforestation and of its rejuvenation. The rebuilding of Gurnet Bridge, the purchase of "Waiting Hill" from my brother Stan, plus the North Hill Golf course and part of the adjacent woodlands and marsh, not to mention Bay Farm of 20 years ago. All these additions to the town's roster, show a willingness

to reach out to new wide areas for the recreational use by the Town's citizens. The rebuilding of Duxbury beach, with a major assist from the Federal Government, is also a case in point. The "greening" of Duxbury and the aggressive expansion of its facilities for living is a salient fact in the new quality of life. I would be remiss if I did not include a recent decision of Town Meeting to renovate our former high school into an expanded library. Under the stimulation of the town's selectmen, I was also a member of a Youth Center Study Committee, chaired by Frank LeBart that met for 5 months, putting together plans for a youth center and now with the former library possibly available for a community center (including a Senior Center and other town groups) the area opposite Duxbury High School can become a municipal social center for a number of the town's citizens.

A recent trip to Vermont brought to my mind the need for Duxbury's "greening," for in the town of Sherburn at the foot of Mt. Killington, there is a valley of flat land of several acres including grassland for baseball, football, and soccer, a swimming pool for adults and a shallow one for kids, and a fitness center with modern exercise machines. It is a splendid community facility and with its membership and parking fees it is close to self supporting.

No one knows where Duxbury's future lies, but the current wave of physical fitness is a movement the town can capture for its citizens and I hope we can take advantage of it. Perhaps a couple of rooms in a new community center would be available. My report from the Vermont recreation centers is that they are all self supporting and widely used by citizens of nearby towns.

This is something like my brother Stan envisages as recreational use of the acres of open land adjoining the present North Hill Golf Course. It would include grassed areas for football, soccer and baseball, smaller areas for shuffleboard and horseshoe throwing for the elderly and 2 swimming pools, one for adults and a shallow one for children.

We now have many walking trails and our open space is as large as any town this side of Cape Cod. A new building housing fitness machines, as in the Plymouth Athletic Club, would also find widespread use. As our population ages and as wilderness areas are shrinking, some innovative planning is required if we are going to lay both hands on the future human development of our town. The "greening" process must continue with the foreseeable future if generations to come are to enjoy the land use we have outlined here.